

Than oghte a god, by short avysement,
Considere his owne honour and his trespas,
for sith no cause of deeth lyth in this cas,
Yow oghte been the lighter merciable;
Leteth your yre, and beth somewhat treftable!
The man hath served yow of his conning,
And forthered your lawe with his making.
Whyl he was yong, he kepte your estat;
I not wher he be now a renegat.
But wel I wot, with that he can endyte,
He hath maked lewed folk delyte
To serve you, in preysing of your name.
He made the book that hight the Hous of fame,
And eek the Deeth of Blaunche the Duchesse,
And the Parlement of foules, as I gesse,
And al the love of Palamon and Arcyte
Of Thebes, though the story is knowen lyte;
And many an ympne for your halydayes,
That highten Balades, Roundels, Virelayes;
And for to speke of other besinesse,
He hath in prose translated Boece;
And of the Wretched Engendring of Mankinde,
As man may in pope Innocent yfnde;
And mad the Lyf also of seynt Cecyle;
He made also, goon sithen a greet whyl,
Origenes upon the Maudeleyne;
Him oghte now to have the lesse payne;
He hath mad many a lay and many a thing.
Now as ye been a god, and eek a king,
I axe yow this man, right of your grace,
That ye him never hurte in al his lyve;
And he shal sweren yow, and that as blyve,
He shal no more agilty in this wyse;
But he shal maken, as ye wil devyse,
Of wemen trewe in lovinge al hir lyve,
Wherso ye wil, of maiden or of wyve,
And forthren yow, as muche as he misseyde
Or in the Rose or elles in Criseyde.

THE god of love answerde hir thus
anoon:
Madame, quod he, hit is so long
agoon
That I yow knew so charitable and
trewe,
That never yit, sith that the world was newe,
To me ne fond I better noon than ye.
That, if that I wol save my degree,
I may ne wol nat warne your requeste;
Al lyth in yow, doth with him what yow leste
And al foryeve, withouten lenger space;
for whoso yeveth a yift, or doth a grace,
Do hit by tyme, his thank is wel the more;
And demeth ye what he shal do therfore.
Go thanke now my lady heer, quod he.
ROOS, and down I sette me on my knec,
And seyde thus: Madame, the God above
foryelde yow, that ye the god of love
han maked me his wrathe to foryive;
And yeve me grace so long for to live,
That I may knowe soothly what ye be
That han me holpen, and put in swich degree.
But trowely I wende, as in this cas,
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Naught have agilt, ne doon to love trespas,
forwhy a trewe man, withouten drede,
hath nat to parten with a theves dede;
Ne a trewe lover oghte me nat blame,
Though that I speke a fals lover som shame.
They oghte rather with me for to holde,
for that I of Criseyde wroot or tolde,
Or of the Rose; whatso myn auctour mente,
Hgate, God wot, hit was myn entente
To forthren trouthe in love and hit cheryce;
And to be war fro falsnesse and fro vyce
By swich ensample; this was my meninge.

AND she answerde: Lat be thyn arguinge;
for Love ne wol nat countrepleted be.
In right ne wrong; and lerne this at me!
Thou hast thy grace, and hold thee right thereto.
Now wol I seyn what penance thou shalt do
for thy trespas, and understond hit here:
Thou shalt, whyl that thou livest, yeev by yere,
The moste party of thy lyve spende
In making of a glorious Legende
Of gode Wemen, maidenes and wyves,
That were trewe in lovinge al hir lyves;
And telle of false men that hem bitrayen,
That al hir lyf ne doon nat but assayen
how many wemen they may doon a shame;
for in your world that is now holden game,
And though thee leste nat a lover be,
Spek wel of love; this penance yeev I thee.
And to the god of love I shal so preyre,
That he shal charge his servants, by any weye,
To forthren thee, and wel thy labour quyte;
Go now thy wey, thy penance is but lyte.

THE god of love gan smyle, and than he seyde:
Mostow, quod he, wher this be wyf or mayde,
Or quene, or countesse, or of what degree,
That hath so litel penance yeven thee,
That hast deserved sorer for to smerte?
But pitee renneth sone in gentil herte;
That mayst thou seen, she kytheth what she is.
And I answerde: Nay, sir, so have I blis,
No more but that I see wel she is good.

THAT is a trewe tale, by myn hood,
Quod Love, and that that thou knowest wel,
pardee,

If hit be so that thou avyse thee,
Hastow nat in a book, lyth in thy cheste,
The grete goodnesse of the quene Alceste,
That turned was into a dayesye:
She that for hir husbonde chees to dye,
And eek to goon to helle, rather than he,
And Ercules rescued hir, pardee,
And broghte hir out of helle agayn to blis?

AND I answerde ageyn, and seyde: Yis,
Now knowe I hir! And is this good Alceste,
The dayesye, and myn owne hertes reste?
Now fele I wel the goodnesse of this wyf,
That bothe after hir deeth, and in hir lyf,
Hir grete bountee doubleth hir renoun!
Wel hath she quit me myn affeccoun!
That I have to hir flour, the dayesye!
No wonder is thogh Jove hir stellifye,
As telleth Agaton, for hir goodnesse!

hir whyte coroun berth of hit witesse;
for also many vertues hadde she,
As smale floures in hir coroun be.
In remembraunce of hir and in honour,
Cibella made the dayesye and the flour
Yecoroned al with whyt, as men may see;
And Mars yaf to hir coroun reed, pardee,
In stede of rubies, set among the whyte.
THERWITH this quene wex reed for
shame a lyte,
Whan she was preysed so in hir
presence.

Chan seyde Love: A ful gret negligence
Was hit to thee, to write unstedfastnesse
Of wemen, sith thou knowest hir goodnesse
By preef, and eek by stories heerbiforn;
Let be the chaf, and wryt wel of the corn.
Whi noldest thou han writen of Alceste,

And leten Criseide been aslepe and reste?
for of Alceste shulde thy wryting be,
Sin that thou wost that kalender is she
Of goodnesse, for she taughte of fyn
lovinge,
And namely of wyfhood the livinge,
And alle the boundes that she oghte kepe;
Thy litel wit was thilke tyme aslepe.
But now I charge thee, upon thy lyf,
That in thy Legend thou make of this wyf,
Whan thou hast othere smale mad before;
And fare now wel, I charge thee no more.
At Cleopatre I wol that thou beginne;
And so forth; and my love so shalt thou
winne.

And with that word of sleep I gan awake,
And right thus on my Legend gan I make.
Explicit prohemium.

INCIPIT LEGENDA CLEOPATRIE MARTIRIS, EGIPTI
REGINE



THE DEETH OF THOLOMEE THE
king,

That al Egipte hadde in his governing,
Regned his quene Cleopataras;
Cil on a tyme befel ther swiche a cas,
That out of Rome was sent a senatour,
for to conqueren regnes and honour
Unto the toun of Rome, as was usaunce,
To have the world un to her obeisaunce;
And, sooth to seye, Antonius was his name.
So fil hit, as fortune him oghte a shame
Whan he was fallen in prosperitee,
Rebel unto the toun of Rome is he.
And over al this, the suster of Cesar,
he lafte hir falsly, er that she was war,
And wolde algates han another wyf;
for whiche he took with Rome and Cesar
stryf.

ATHELLES, forsooth, this ilke
senatour
Was a ful worthy gentil werreyour,

And of his deeth hit was ful greet damage.
But love had broght this man in swiche a
rage,
And him so narwe bounden in his las,
At for the love of Cleopataras,
That al the world he sette at no value.
Him thoughte, nas to him no thing so due
As Cleopatras for to love and serve;
Him roghte nat in armes for to sterve
In the defence of hir, and of hir right.

THIS noble quene eek lovede so this
knight,
Through his desert, & for his chivalrye;
As certainly, but if that bokes lye,
He was, of persone and of gentillesse,
And of discrecioun and hardinesse,
Worthy to any wight that liven may.
And she was fair as is the rose in May.
And, for to maken shortly is the beste,
She wex his wyf, and hadde him as hir leste.

THE wedding and the feste to devyse,
To me, that have ytake swiche
empryse
Of so many a storie for to make,
Hit were to long, lest that I sholde slake
Of thing that bereth more effect and charge;
for men may overlade a ship or barge;
And forthy to theffect than wol I skippe,
And al the remenant, I wol lete hit slippe.

CTOVIAN, that wood was of this
dede,
Shoop him an ost on Antony to lede
Alouterly for his destruccioun,
With stoute Romans, cruel as leoun;
To ship they wente, and thus I let hem saile.
ANTONIS was war, and wol nat faile
To meten with thise Romans, if he
may;
Took eek his reed, and bothe, upon a day,
His wyf and he, and al his ost, forth wente